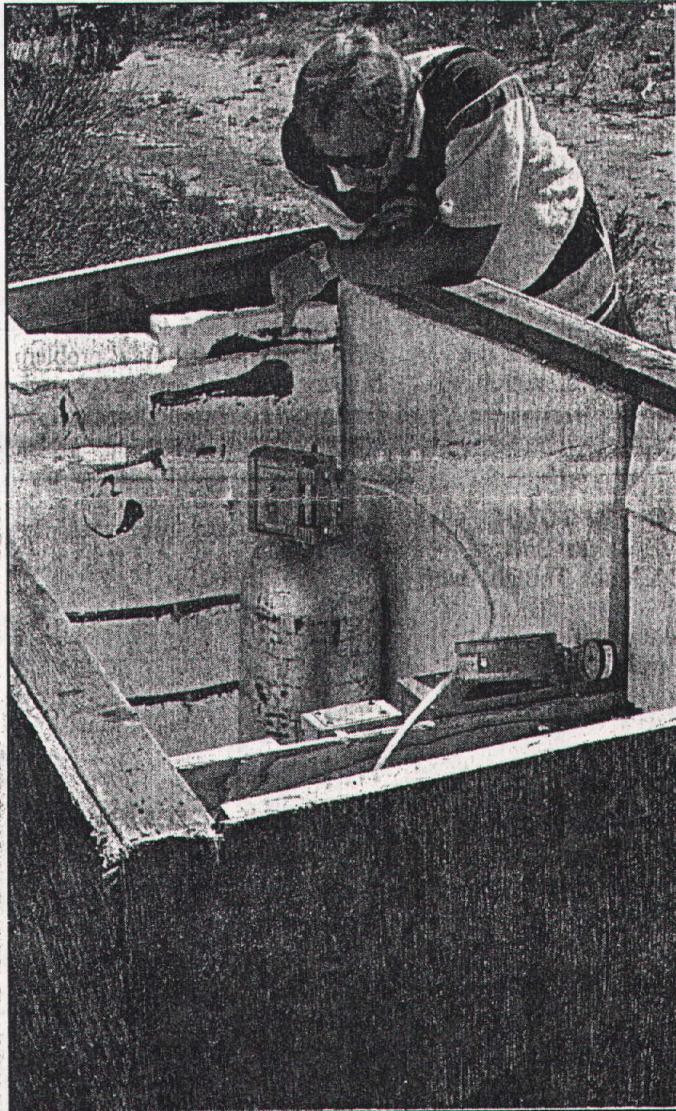
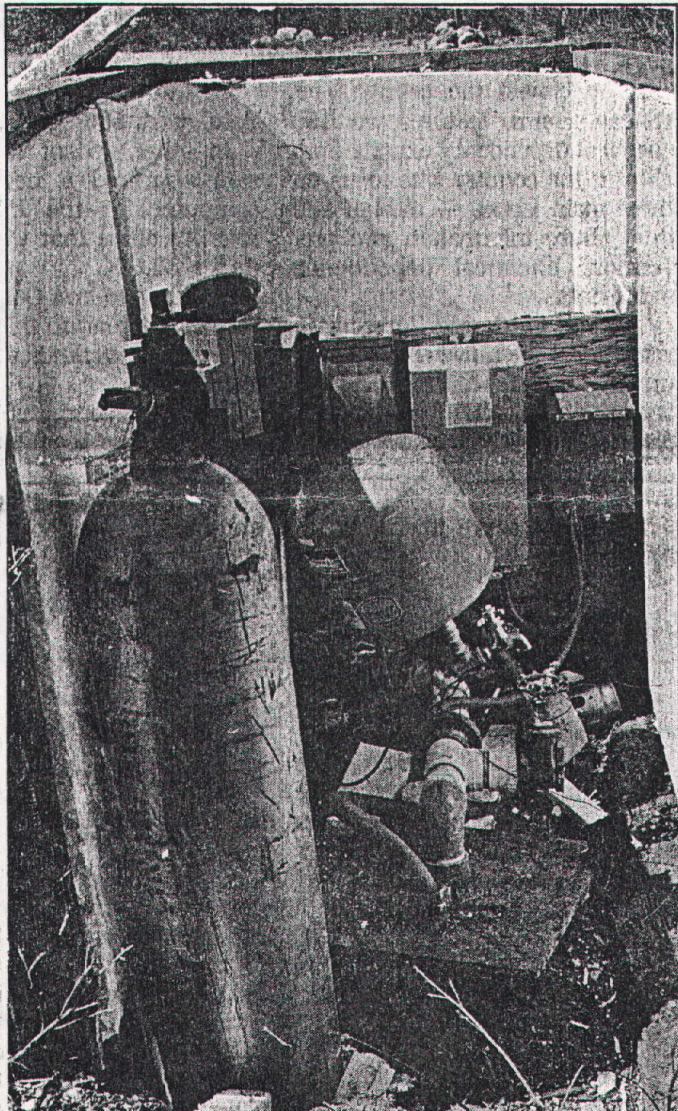


M/053/002

## Bad water



Spectrum Photo / Aura Warburton

Water official Colin Korpi (at right) notes Silver Valley well which has tested positive for high lev-

els of cancer-causing radium. Above ground equipment (at left) has become a safe haven for rats.

# Silver Valley water contaminated

By **SCOTT SUMMERILL**  
Staff Writer

**SILVER VALLEY, Utah** — Water flowing through the taps in Silver Valley may look pure, but it is tainted with cancer-causing radium.

Recent tests show high levels of radium particles in the community's water supply, probably from mill tailings of an abandoned uranium mine.

Health officials suspected problems a year ago when Gross Alpha particles were detected in the valley's water. Further testing revealed radium levels above the accepted limits of five parts per million.

Gross Alpha particles are microscopic bits left when elements break down at the atomic level. Most of the particles are harmless. But others, such as those produced when radium

breaks down, can damage developing cells and cause cancer.

"It's like a bullet being fired from inside the body," Ken Bousfield, compliance program manager with the Utah Division of Drinking Water, said. "If it passes through without hitting anything there's no harm. But if it passes through a cell while it is dividing it damages the developing chromosomes. That's how

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# **WATER: Silver Valley town well contains radium**

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cancer gets started."

The community's well is located in the lowest part of a valley just below Silver Reef that was heavily mined by the 5M mining company until 1981. Mounds of tailings surround a makeshift pump house made of propped-up plywood. Open leach fields used to wash ores mined from the mountain lie several hundred yards uphill from the well.

"When there is a good rain, the leach fields can overflow. That runoff can go right down the well shaft," Colin Korpi, vice president of the community's water association, says. "Everybody up here is drinking bottled water."

Bousfield says there are serious concerns of long-term health risks to the 25 households being served by the water system.

"We are strongly urging the community to look for an alternate water source," he said.

Those sources, however, may be somewhat limited.

The best alternative is to get water from neighboring Leeds, whose main water line passes within half a mile of the subdivision. But Leeds officials says that is impossible.

"We can't annex Silver Valley without violating all our subdivision ordinances," acting Leeds Mayor Fred Friese says. "And the water company can't sell water outside the city because of their bylaws. It's really a sorry mess."

Jerry Glazer, president of 5M Inc., said his company registered protests over the well's use with

Washington County and the state when the developer registered the well as an irrigation water source.

"The developer claimed the water was only going to be used for irrigation," Glazer said. "But there was no doubt they were going to let people drink this water."

Glazer said establishing a culinary well in the middle of a mining site was "ludicrous."

Washington County records indicate 5M protests were in

regards to ownership of the water rights.

"There's nothing in our records regarding water quality," county planning consultant John Willie said.

Utah Health Department granted approval for the water source in 1981. A 1989 approval updated the well for culinary use, indicating the water had a high salt content and prohibiting com-